

Final Research Proposal

The Problem

The Illini Union Board prides itself on being the University's largest student-run organization on campus. And admittedly, no student organization has a substantial means for comparison. The IUB is a fully funded institution backed by proceeds from the Illini Union Bookstore, student fees, as well as university sponsored fund-raisers. Founded in 1942, the IUB seeks to provide students with a paraprofessional experience that translates relatively easily into the "real" world. And it is this experience that I hope to explore.

As Lance Wright noted in our March interview, any relationship that is to exist between the cultural programs area of the Illini Union Board and the universities ethnic cultural centers are dependent upon student interests. However, such statements lead me to ask if such delicate matters can be as simple as that? Should students eager to participate in the university setting become the sole bearers of the collective burden that is community representation and advancement? If so, than what is the purpose and role of an advisor to a student run organization? And lastly, by adopting a larger cultural programs area, has the Illini Union Board accepted and lived up to the social obligation that is nurtured within the consciousness of student life and activism at the universities cultural centers?

Site Selection

Many of the questions I would like to begin asking, along with the bulk of this project, stem a great deal from personal experience with both the Illini Union Board and La Casa Cultural Latina. My experience, thus, helps me build on larger ideological questions concerning student development within both cites and how cultural representation is approached in different university settings. Ultimately, the goal of this project would be to serve as an informational source for students of color interested in the IUB as well as words of encouragement to inspire development of more self-sustaining connections across the very settings that inspire the cultural consciousness within students.

Literature Review

Literature surrounding the Illini Union Board is fairly scarce, however, work can be found regarding student leadership and organizational development techniques in various journals in the field of higher education. Such sources might prove to be useful in discerning advisory methods and preparation as Program Managers in the Illini Union begin to deal with students on a macro scale and students of color on a more micro scale.

This being said, anthropological work concerning the Illini Union Board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is non-existent. This work, thus, would work to fill a much needed gap in developing anthropological understanding of student development via co-curricular activities.

Methods

The participant-observation of the daily workings in the Illini Union Board is a key method in understanding the IUB's approach to programming and networking. Additional time would be spent in the various Cultural Houses on campus in order to construct a vision of the "politics" involved in co-sponsorship between the two university units.

Conducting a focus group amongst student board and committee members who are also known to be fairly active within respective cultural houses and communities would allow me to draw upon the experiences of these students and continue to attempt to tease out the relevance of cultural programs along with its position in communities of color. As indicated by my interview with Lance Wright, connections between the IUB and the cultural houses are mostly dependent upon the students themselves, so working through the reasoning of such students would be a key determinant in examining the formation of such relationships.

Additionally, archival research on the Illini Union Board, La Casa Cultural Latina, and the African-American Cultural Program could allow for a historical analysis of co-sponsorships, networking attempts, and also mentalities behind the relationships of such work.

Ethical Challenges

The greatest ethical challenge I will face is attempting to objectively discern between anthropological findings and personal narrative/experiences. Aside from this, if interviewees decide to remain confidential, then I will use alternative names and not make reference to the positions they held or the years they did so. However, race is an important distinction to make in this type of study in that understanding the differences in perceptions and mentalities of students of color and white students is vital to positioning networking relationships amongst the cultural houses and the Illini Union Board.